

World FM Day – Leading a Sustainable Future

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The Power of FM by Alan Stenson of neutralcarbonzone Ltd

The world has a challenge on its hands. We must rapidly reduce global emissions to secure a liveable future. Now is the time to turn targets into strategies.

The Facilities Management industry is rapidly evolving, pushing forward the implementation of solutions that positively impact economic, social and environmental sustainability. Increasing numbers of organisations now embrace the low-carbon transition, seeing it as a strategic priority for the business and its staff, customers, suppliers, and all affected parties. The specific environmental impact of products and services is now a leading theme in commercial tenders, which was rarely seen just a few years ago. The FM sector is at the heart of this drive to integrate innovation and sustainability into the services that we, as an industry, deliver.

By adopting a truly sustainable approach to business, our sector has enormous potential to deliver results. For example, all seventeen of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are now within reach. This is partly because the FM world has the distinct advantage of being able to incorporate the SDGs at both organisational and operational levels: a move that can directly influence and change individual behavioural by providing the right environment for employees, services and operations to embrace sustainable practices. As an industry with a broad reach, we are presented with an exciting opportunity to make a genuine and significant change. With that power comes the responsibility to act and make a difference, a big difference.



The following are not exhaustive but provide insight into how the FM sector can positively contribute toward the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, ending poverty for all (SDG 1) and providing decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) are addressed through job creation, resulting in financial and social improvement. FM is also involved in managing and improving inclusive educational facilities (SDG 4). The sustainable maintenance of buildings in cities and communities assists with SDG 11, and installing and managing efficient buildings and energy systems aligns with SDGs 6 and 7. Sustainable and circular procurement policies can drive SDG 12, and the continued work of the FM sector concerning diversity and equality in the workplace contributes to SDGs 5 and 10. By measuring, reducing, reporting and offsetting the emissions that our products and services create, we engage in taking urgent climate action (SDG 13). The world of FM has the power to make a positive contribution to all of these important goals.

The current picture of the climate crisis is alarming. Meteorological reports suggest a 50:50 chance of a global warming increase of more than the COP 26 1.5C limit in at least one of the next five years. Organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) call for decisive action. Now is the time. Businesses across the globe must do more, taking real action. It is time to banish the green wash, the empty promises, lack of commitment, and misleading claims about targets and timelines. Sustainability is more than an unambitious marketing strategy. It is an opportunity to make a genuine improvement for all.

Having worked to provide carbon management and sustainability solutions to the FM sector for over fifteen years, we see that attitudes have changed. The shift in the past three years is particularly significant. Businesses now prioritise products and services that genuinely incorporate sustainability as an integrated element – not just a tick box or quick-fix solution. As knowledge and awareness grows, encouraging progress is being made.

Many FM companies not yet directly captured under the current legislative compliance requirements are proactively working towards positioning themselves as leaders in their field. These organisations are not taking mandatory action; they take voluntary action, driving the sector forward.

Current advancements in the FM sector include the erection of net-zero buildings—innovative energy solutions created using data-driven technology. Circular economy policies with zero waste and zero plastics are being deployed, market-leading recycling services, waste to energy projects, efficient

consumables transportation, including automation, and smart technologies. All areas integrate sustainability and emissions reductions and are all industry-driven. Our ability to make a quantifiable commercial, social and environmental impact is far-reaching.

Taking a three-phase approach to delivering an effective carbon management program is critical. Phase one concentrates on establishing a baseline of organisational emissions and uses this carbon footprint as a benchmark on which to base future emission reduction activities. Phase two is widening this remit to include the operational emissions from products and services. The third phase is about engaging with the supply chain. Through effective collaboration, organisations can report on and influence the reduction of emissions coming from all business activities – including those beyond their control.

Overall, progress is certainly being made across all sectors of big business. The SBTI's most recent annual report states that 2,253 companies worth a total of over \$38trn have committed to having their emissions reductions targets verified by the SBTI, and globally 27% of heavy emitting companies have now set targets. These statistics are encouraging, but there remains significant room for improvement – among the remaining 73%.

Building on the existing success, the SME market can adopt a clear and appropriate action plan to ensure successful carbon management. Identifying main emissions drivers deliver targeted efficiency rather than a scattergun approach to “doing the right thing”. By establishing the appropriate course of action and specific requirements, organisations are much more likely to successfully integrate a viable and beneficial program that delivers for all parties involved. The questions are, what are you looking to achieve? Will the solutions benefit the entire value chain? Does your approach enable you to deliver commercial, social and environmental value? How do we fully integrate, making it part of our business's very fibre, the ethos? There is no “one size fits all” in this field; therefore, your plans must work for you.

Our responsibility is to take ownership, as a sector, of our shared journey to Net-zero. The FM reach is enormous and, when channelled correctly, can most certainly deliver on the theme of World FM Day – Leading a Sustainable Future. We have the power; we have the reach, and we can lead the way.

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